



**University of  
Zurich**<sup>UZH</sup>

**Zurich Open Repository and  
Archive**

University of Zurich  
University Library  
Strickhofstrasse 39  
CH-8057 Zurich  
[www.zora.uzh.ch](http://www.zora.uzh.ch)

---

Year: 2008

---

## **Conceptual challenges to the paradigms of comparative media systems in a globalized world**

Pfetsch, B ; Esser, Frank

**Abstract:** National media systems are the central units of analysis in comparative mass communication research. In times of growing globalization, however, it is increasingly difficult to treat national media systems as isolated cases — a dilemma that undermines the traditional logic of comparative research. A careful examination of the core conceptual challenges leads this article to conclude that global processes of diffusion do by no means spell the end of the comparative research of media systems. Global processes of diffusion do however demand for comparative designs that account for the fact that national media systems are becoming increasingly interconnected. This article makes three practical suggestions to tackle these challenges: The first suggestion is to include additional levels of analysis below and above the nation state level; the second suggestion is to incorporate theories from the field of International Communications; and the third is to remain cautious about the extent to which globalization penetrates national media systems. There is still reason to presume that media systems can be compared along the lines of national boundaries. We are required to modify and extent our tools though.

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-76133>

Journal Article

Published Version

Originally published at:

Pfetsch, B; Esser, Frank (2008). Conceptual challenges to the paradigms of comparative media systems in a globalized world. *Journal of Global Mass Communication*, 1(4):118-131.

---

# JOURNAL OF GLOBAL MASS COMMUNICATION

---

Volume I, Numbers 3/4

Summer/Fall 2008

## SPECIAL ISSUE ON COMPARING MEDIA SYSTEMS RECONSIDERED

- 111 Thomas Hanitzsch  
*Comparing Media Systems Reconsidered: Recent Development and Directions for Future Research*
- 118 Barbara Pfetsch and Frank Esser  
*Conceptual Challenges to the Paradigms of Comparative Media Systems in a Globalized World*
- 132 Hallvard Moe and Helle Sjøvaag  
*The Challenges of Comparing Media Systems — An Interview with Daniel C. Hallin*
- 142 John A. Hatcher  
*News Media and Their State: A Comparative Analysis of Press Systems in 36 Democracies*
- 165 Hartmut Wessler, Malgorzata Skorek, Katharina Kleinen-von Königsłow, Maximilian Held, Mihaela Dobрева and Manuel Adolphsen  
*Comparing Media Systems and Media Content: Online Newspapers in Ten Eastern and Western European Countries*
- 190 Jo Bardoel and Leen d'Haenens  
*Converging PSB Policies in Western Europe: The Netherlands and Flanders Compared*
- 210 Juraj Kittler  
*Paris and Philadelphia: A Comparative Structural Analysis of the Early Roots of the French and U.S. Communication Systems*
- 235 Tal Samuel-Azran  
*The Advent of Counter-Hegemonic Contra-Flow*

## OTHER ARTICLES

- 251 Hun Shik Kim, Seow Ting Lee and Crispin C. Maslog  
*Peacemakers or Warmongers? Asian News Media Coverage of Conflicts*
- 271 Ronald R. Rodgers  
*OhmyNews and Its Citizen Journalists as Avatars of a Postmodern Marketplace of Ideas*

# CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES TO THE PARADIGMS OF COMPARATIVE MEDIA SYSTEMS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

BARBARA PFETSCH AND FRANK ESSER

*National media systems are the central units of analysis in comparative mass communication research. In times of growing globalization, however, it is increasingly difficult to treat national media systems as isolated cases — a dilemma that undermines the traditional logic of comparative research. A careful examination of the core conceptual challenges leads this article to conclude that global processes of diffusion do by no means spell the end of the comparative research of media systems. Global processes of diffusion do however demand for comparative designs that account for the fact that national media systems are becoming increasingly interconnected. This article makes three practical suggestions to tackle these challenges: The first suggestion is to include additional levels of analysis below and above the nation state level; the second suggestion is to incorporate theories from the field of International Communications; and the third is to remain cautious about the extent to which globalization penetrates national media systems. There is still reason to presume that media systems can be compared along the lines of national boundaries. We are required to modify and extent our tools though.*

**Keywords:** media systems, comparative communication research, globalization, international communication

In their stocktaking about the state of the art in comparative communication Michael Gurevitch and Jay Blumler (2004) pointed out that this field of research has overcome its early state and become a true sub-discipline in its own right. In a way, this “maturation” has

---

**Barbara Pfetsch** is professor for communications at the Freie Universität Berlin (pfetsch@zedat.fu-berlin.de). *Frank Esser* is professor for international and comparative media research at the University of Zuerich (f.esser@ipmz.uzh.ch).

brought about the need to review theoretical concepts and to study the designs and methodology of comparative research. It also seems timely to discuss methodological developments and the challenges that must be met by theoretical reflection. In this vein, our article aims to discuss the challenges for research in comparative media systems that arise from globalization and transnationalization of communication systems. “New realities” regarding the comparative approach to the study of media systems derive from the fact that as a consequence of globalization, national boundaries are overcome through new modes of information flow, economic exchange and governance. The question arises as to whether and to what degree the discrimination of nationally bounded communication systems is still a valid and meaningful concept for social scientific inquiry. If the answer is yes, we need to ask how we can readjust our approach to comparative media systems facing global phenomena of governance and communication.

In this article, we want to stimulate the debate on the impact of globalization on comparative media systems by raising four points:

(1) First, we take globalization as a starting point of media development and reflect on the nature and meaning of “global” research. Does such a perspective exist, and how should it be conceived? Does the affirmation of global research equate with the end of the comparative approach and in particular the comparative analysis of media systems? Our argument here is that global social science research must not be re-defined in terms of the level of — global or national — analysis. Instead, we wish to stress that fundamental social change like globalization must be addressed by refocusing our research questions instead of the level of analysis. As globalization affects all levels of society, it does not free us from comparative research. Quite the contrary, we need to study the effects of globalization with comparative designs on the micro, meso, macro and supranational levels.

(2) Regarding politics and political communication, globalization leads to more transnationalized forms of governance. As a consequence, we also face new forms of legitimization and therefore political communication that transcend the nation state, while at the same time media systems are bound to national political cultures and communication infrastructures. Thus, the fit between the national communication systems and factual supranational political decision making has become precarious. We can illustrate this dilemma with the example of the European Union. In the light of transnational governance we need to discuss how we can conceptualize transnational linkages between the media that develop beyond the national structures. As an answer we propose to introduce additional categories above and below the nation state that seem valuable tools for analyzing transnational flows of information, communication and politics.

(3) The nation state is therefore not the only context for media systems analysis, but as we argue further in this article, it remains relevant and it should not be prematurely dismissed as an important point of reference. Although global influences cause substantial cultural and structural shifts within media systems, these shifts are not identical across all systems. Context-sensitive comparisons will unveil distinctive patterns in the way national media systems respond to global influences; these response patterns often disclose valuable

information about a media system's specific identity. These cultural and structural patterns in turn, can be grouped and analyzed within the framework of comparative media systems analysis.

(4) If global influences are to be incorporated into comparative research, however, we need to broaden our view and revisit theoretical concepts about communication flows within and across media systems. In a world of global communication and communication systems, theories that explain communication across societies must be reconsidered. This means, as we will argue further, to systematically incorporate theories of international communication into our framework of analysis.

We think of our contribution in this special issue as a glimpse at a larger set of questions, each of which deserves deep reflection. However, our intention is to point out challenges that stir up new thoughts and to further reasoning in comparative communication studies. Needless to say, it is easier to raise new questions than to provide substantial answers and easy solutions.

## CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION FOR COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

The comparative approach — as we have argued before (Esser & Pfetsch 2004) — enfolds its greatest *theoretical potential* when it is used to develop typologies, validate concepts, and generalize or contextualize theories. The last two points are critical. Only the comparative approach allows us to *generalize* our (mostly) middle range theories about media systems by testing and validating them in different socio-cultural settings. If replications in different systemic and cultural environments show the same stable effect (or the same empirical pattern or causal relationship), the mechanism and its underlying theory can be gradually generalized. Second, comparative research helps us to put into context our theories by discerning those contextual factors in the presence of which a theory is mainly valid. It thereby provides an answer to the question as to whether a theory on media systems can be administered globally or whether it is valid only under certain systemic or cultural conditions.

Both generalization and contextualization are based on the fundamental principle of treating nations, societies or cultures as bound units. Traditionally, international comparisons rest on (mostly national) cases (i.e. systems or cultures) as clearly defined bound units which serve as hosts of our dependent and independent variables. Usually, the macro-level setting is treated as an explanatory variable for variations in the dependent variable. The classic example is to derive hypotheses about the effects of news coverage on political knowledge depending on the structural conditions of the media system (for instance, strong public broadcasting vs. weak broadcasting). In comparative media systems we have almost automatically treated the national level as a definite unit of analysis. However, as we are now confronted with the causes and consequences of globalization

which transcend and undermine national boundaries the traditional macro level categories of comparative media research must be put into a broader context.

Hence, the first and foremost reason to critically reconsider comparative cross-national research — not only in communications but in social research in general — is the emergence of globalization. It is beyond doubt among social scientists that globalization is one of the most powerful engines of social change (Babones 2006). Previous societies were contained by the limits of transportation and communication and governed by the institutional ideology of the nation state which produced and relied on nationally defined forms of collective identity. Globalized societies are confronted by new forces of social change that overcome international borders and operate on a global scale.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the question must be raised as to whether the former categories of comparative media research are still valid for capturing these new developments.

There are two angles to this problem:

First, in a naïve way, one could refer to globalization in terms of a global media system which consists of all media systems with a target population including (ideally) all countries or all people of the world. This approach is a simple extension of the comparative research approach in terms of an inclusive world population or an enlargement of the comparative media systems approach used so far. For instance, by using a data set of more than 100 countries, Norris (2004) has shown that there is a positive relationship between free media and indicators of good governance and human development. In a way, if this study included a maximum numbers of country cases, it would be conceived of as global. However, a closer look to the research question reveals that this kind of extension of cross-national research is not necessarily global. The relationship between free media and the level of good governance and human development, which is the core of the research, must not necessarily be treated as a correlation that works on a global level. It can also be treated as a problem of comparative policy research which is nationally framed and would not qualify as global media systems research. Thus, the example demonstrates that global research does not so much refer to the number of cases and the unit of analysis, but to the framing of the research problem in truly global terms. In fact globalization can be a cause or an effect of the development of media systems and their consequences on every level of society.

Second, the other way to go about the influence of globalization on comparative research is to look at the global system as a level of analysis. Thus, the research would regard the world system as one entity and study global problems (for instance regarding the flow and nature of information in the media) in terms of a single case study. It goes without saying this is also quite naïve since this approach would mean excluding a large number of truly global problems which can only be studied by comparisons that are settled on the national level. The relationship between national media policies and the degree to which they enhance global infotainment formats may serve as an example for such an investigation. The study would treat nations as components of larger international systems which reveal specific features or follow a specific logic. In our example the larger global development would be the inherent

dynamic of amalgamation of information and entertainment in political news coverage. According to the typology of cross-national research by Melvin L. Kohn (1987, p. 715) such a research approach incorporates larger systemic (global) factors, yet its research strategy stays within a traditional framework of comparing national cases. This approach comes closest to what we might perceive as global research, namely adding a level of analysis to cross-national research that transgresses the nation state and is bound to a larger system of its own qualities.

However, if we take into account the earlier argument that global research must address global problems or questions of global range, then it does not seem sufficient to just add a larger international or global category to the existing cross-national dimensions of research (although it is a surely necessary condition for global research). On the one hand, we see new social units appearing as a consequence of globalization, for instance supranational communication networks and media institutions gaining power and transnational linkages being strengthened in particular regions of the world. On the other hand, we also note that there are problems that are global in their reach and yet can only be studied on the individual level. For instance, the research on problems that apply to all humanity, like research on the global epidemics of AIDS cannot but be studied on the individual level.

This leads us to conclude that the study of global dimensions of media and communication systems must rest on a reformulation of the research question and not so much on the inclusion or exclusion of the existing levels of social analysis. As Babones' (2006, p. 17-23) argues with respect to the nature of global research:

Even if the research question asked is global in scope, the units of analysis used in answering that question need not be. Units of analysis used in global social research can range from the smallest (individual human or sensor) to the largest (the world itself at different points in time).

Consequentially, if we study globalization in communication research, we need to reconsider first of all the *level of analysis of the research question* and not question the level of analysis as such. As the globalization of media systems and the global flow of information affects phenomenon on all levels of society, it must be studied on all levels of society and with respect to *all levels of analysis*.

An example for a truly global desiderate is the internet. The internet is a primarily global medium, as there are no national border posts for information. Following our argument, global communication via the internet can be studied from various angles and at various levels: at the individual level of the internet's use and diffusion; at the level of new communication modes of social groups or social movements who meet in virtual chat rooms and design political action strategies; and at the level of internet governance at the national or transnational European level or with respect to UN policies to regulate the internet globally. Finally, we may also study the global digital divide, as some scholars have attempted. If we study these questions, we find that global social forces can be the *causes*

*or effects* of the problem that we are studying, yet, the units of analysis can be manifold individual regions, countries, areas or the world as such.

Regarding comparative research, we may conclude that, on the one hand, the study of global questions in media and information does not free us from comparative research designs and all the problems that are inherent in comparative empirical inquiry. On the other hand, one can hardly imagine the study of globalization of media systems, communications and politics other than with comparative designs on all level of empirical analysis.

## THE NATION STATE AND OTHER LEVELS AS A MEANINGFUL UNIT OF ANALYSIS IN COMPARATIVE MEDIA SYSTEMS

The framework in which media systems are usually studied refers to nation states and political regimes or political cultures in the broadest sense. The classical example for this angle is the work by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) which ties the media system closely to distinct political regimes, countries and their institutions. Hallin and Mancini (2004) take up this perspective when they discuss party-press parallelism as a dimension of media systems and their functions. The advent of globalization has made the connection between political regimes and media systems more complicated. On the one hand, we see more transnationalized forms of governance, supranational institutions and forms of political decision making. At the same time, we also face new forms of communication beyond the nation state and a fragmentation of media systems within nation states. This simultaneity of fragmentation and transnationalization can be illustrated with the example of the European Union (EU). On the one hand, political integration within the EU undermines the role of EU member states as independent units. Increasingly, powers of decision in vital matters are either integrated or transferred to transnational institutions. On the other hand, we can also observe that within nation states, formal or effective powers are delegated to regional or local units. In this contradictory situation it becomes clear that the level of the traditional nation state is on the losing side. Thus, the “‘national’ power to control citizens, groups and enterprises becomes more dubious in a world of increased mobility and communication, affecting the status of individual ‘states’ as realistic units for comparative analysis” (Keman, 2002, p. 29). Again, supranational arrangements and transnational forms of governance as well as the weakening political power of the nation state brings back the question about the adequate unit of analysis in media systems analysis. For instance, in the media industry, there is considerable market regulation by the EU that has a direct influence not only on the mergers and acquisitions in the media market but also on the regulation of advertising and content production. Furthermore, EU directives influence large parts of the national legislative decisions in integrated policy areas. A large number of domestic policies are highly influenced by decisions of supranational institutions.



Although transnational structures of communication, governance and professional practices challenge our understanding of the nation state as the relevant context of media performance (Livingstone 2008), the end of the nation state as a meaningful category for comparative media systems research has not yet come. At the same time it is clear, that the nation state is no longer the only relevant category. In order to capture the empirical development of media systems, additional units of analyses — either above or below the level of the nation state — must be included, depending on the research question of inquiry.

Studies at the supra-state level can be found in the recent development of analytical area studies. One example is research into democratization processes in different world regions. It focuses on the relationship between democratic political culture and media systems in societies in transformation. Given the idiosyncratic settings and political histories of the so-called new democracies, simple nation-based comparisons hardly reveal systematic insights to the relationship between democratic development and media functions. Thus, it has turned out most useful to go beyond the nation state and apply concepts of path dependency. Voltmer (2008a, 2008b) works along this trajectory when she compares political communication in regions like Eastern Europe, South America and Africa and develops a set of hypotheses about the path-dependent development of media systems in developing democracies. Another strand of comparative analysis of media systems argues that the cultural, historical or political experiences of countries may provide a common background which distinguishes them from others and provides the setting for the development of a specific type of communication infrastructure and relationship with politics. Francis Castles (1993; Castles & Obinger, 2008), uses the term “family of nations” to pool together a group of countries that can be compared with another group regarding their social policies. Similarly, Hallin and Mancini (2004) distinguish a typology of countries with particular media systems which rests on a particular cultural, historical and political heritage. In their investigation into media systems, the type of relationship between the most important qualifications of modern democratic media systems and politics builds the units of comparison at the level above the nation state.

Research into the level below the state can be found in analyses of social or political sub-cultures or partial segments of society. One example to compare media systems on this level is the investigation into social, political or ethnic communities and their media. In studies about the communication infrastructure and the media behavior of particular sub-cultures of society, it is necessary to choose a unit of analysis which is not defined in terms of national spaces but relates to social or cultural spaces. For instance, in the study of Adoni, Caspi and Cohen (2006) the media of Arab and Russian ethnic communities in Israel were compared and discussed against the background of Israeli majority media. The project makes an excellent case for the argument that the study of comparative media systems must not be restricted to national spaces but must also be open for comparisons between social spaces. The same is true for political sub-cultures which might be investigated with respect

to political communication and interaction of politicians with the media. For instance, comparative studies of political communication cultures (e.g., Pfetsch 2004, 2008a, 2008b), which seek to explore and typify the orientations of political communication actors as a subset of a national political culture are located at a sub-nation-state level. Thus, categories of political spaces can also form a meaningful category for comparative communication systems. In the case of political communication systems the comparative logic at the national level may be applied when particular patterns of the interaction between media and politics that can be identified as typical political communication cultures are systematically linked to specific types of media systems (Pfetsch & Maurer, 2008).

As these examples show, comparative designs ought to include additional levels of analysis at the supra- and sub-nation-state level to answer new sets of research questions. Let us now turn to the practical consequences for comparative media systems analysis of what has been discussed so far.

## METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The denationalization of media systems poses new methodological challenges. To illustrate the problem it is helpful to recapitulate the logic of comparative inquiry (Landman, 2008; Peters, 1998; Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Besides categorizing findings and generalizing theories, comparative research is most fundamentally interested in explaining causal relationships.

Explanatory comparative analysis seeks to establish causal links between specific structural features of a given media system (independent variables) and outcomes in media performance (dependent variables). Let us assume that one is interested in the relationship between press subsidies (i.e. state aid available in some media systems but not in others) and press diversity (measured by the number of newspapers in the market); to examine whether press subsidies generally promote press diversity or not requires a comparative analysis. This logic is inherent in all Most Similar Systems Designs. Formally speaking, MSSD studies ‘manipulate’ the independent variable by purposefully selecting cases for the analysis that in many ways are very similar (e.g. Scandinavian media systems) but differ in the one critical variable (for example some grant press subsidies whereas others do not). The first challenge to establishing a causal link lies in the question of how to deal with all the other known and unknown variables that also differentiate these media systems (for example, market size) and, more importantly, may have plausible effects on the outcome variable (that is market pluralism).

But there is a second challenge associated with extraneous variance that is of bigger interest here because it arises directly from increasing globalization. Similar transnational trends across media systems make it harder to discern whether changes in the outcome variable (such as an increase in free metro papers) are the result of indigenous structural

features of the selected media systems, or the product of border-transgressing diffusion (e.g., hired foreign consultants propagating this business model).<sup>2</sup> Of course, the diffusion does not make changes in the outcome variables any less real, but it does complicate the logic of comparative designs. The conventional logic would try to explain changes in media outcomes by indigenous changes in media structure. But the increasing international nature of mass communication has led to adaptations in media structures and a convergence of behavior among media entrepreneurs and employees.

These common global trends make comparative media systems research both more difficult and more stimulating. It is becoming more difficult because it is sometimes hard to determine whether media outcomes are a product of indigenous conditions or a product of diffusion. It is becoming more stimulating because it forces us to think across levels of analysis. Globally effective stimuli may affect any kind of behavior of journalists on the micro level or any kind of activity news organizations display on the meso level in a given media system — but these stimuli are unlikely to influence individuals or institutional structures directly, and cause universally identical effects on them across all systems. Media systems are not empty containers after all, and journalists or news organizations are no passive receivers of outside stimuli. The manner in which they respond is likely to demonstrate valuable information about the specific conditions of the media system in question. In fact, context-sensitive comparativists would expect a systematic relationship between the structural and cultural factors of a given media system and its unique adoption and adaptation strategies to global influences (Peters, 1998). Put differently, global influences are negotiated and articulated at the level of the individual media system (Chadha & Kavoori, 2005; Morris & Waisbord, 2001). Media systems, in turn, are embedded in national and — as in the case of the European Union — supranational media landscapes. The nation state is thus not the only context for media systems anymore, but is still a relevant one. For example, the political economy of the nation state still heavily determines the structure of the media industries; state authorities continue to play a central role in media regulation; patterns of media consumption are still overwhelmingly culture-bound; and even transnational programming flows are mediated by national policies and conditions. Without doubt, global influences trigger substantial cultural shifts and structural transformations of media systems. These processes, however, still occur within national contexts. They can, and in fact often should, be compared from one country to another (Chadha & Kavoori, 2005; Peters, 1998).

This helps us draw additional conclusions about the relationship between globalization and comparative media systems research. As argued above, there are good reasons to include additional levels of analysis to our designs below and above the level of the nation state. However, there are also good reasons not to dismiss the national level too easily. There are at least two arguments for a continuation of nation-level comparisons: First, many theories and research questions that deal with media aspects are still based on the relevance of

national boundaries. Second, the transformations of media systems that have occurred as effects of recent global trends often show culturally and structurally distinctive patterns which are determined by national contexts. In sum, comparative research needs to focus more on the transformations of individual media systems but these globally induced changes are — at least up until now — negotiated and domesticated at the national level. This demands a more complex re-conceptualization of the national context, not its abandonment.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The fact that comparative communication research needs to take the transformative changes within and across national media systems into account more seriously has far reaching theoretical consequences. It suggests a need for incorporating theories of transnationalization and social change within comparative frameworks. Such theories can be found in the neighboring discipline of International Communication (Anokwa, Lin, & Salwen, 2003; Kleinsteuber, 2004; Thussu, 2001). Important theories include transformation, dependency, diffusion and modernization, imperialism and Americanization as well as hybridization. Proponents of incorporating *transformation* research into comparative designs include Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) who complain that previous media systems research has put too much emphasis on comparing the status quo, and, by doing so, neglected the rapid changes in the conditions determining mass communication which demand dynamic explanations and longitudinal designs. Cross-cultural research needs to be combined with cross-temporal research.

Another pertinent theory is *dependency*. In today's understanding, dependencies are less the result of colonial ties but more often a direct outcome of international treaties (e.g., GATS) from membership in supranational intergovernmental institutions (e.g., the European Union) or international organizations (e.g., the United Nations). Legislative acts of the European Union, for instance, account for approximately 60 percent of the legislation passed in its member states. National contexts no longer suffice to explain common phenomena; we must include the supranational level, too.

The relevance of *diffusion and modernization research* was already implicated above in the discussion of Galton's Problem: Can we explain similar phenomena occurring in different societies as a functional differentiation caused by domestic factors or as the imitation of foreign models caused by foreign factors? In the first case, a phenomenon is interpreted according to modernization theory: The phenomenon exists because it performs indispensable functions for its social-political environment; similar environmental conditions require similar solutions and produce similar structures without foreign intervention. In the latter case, a phenomenon is explained by diffusion theory: It exists because national elites decided to adopt a foreign model. This decision is based on the conviction that the foreign model is worth imitating and that it can be modified to fit into

traditional national regulatory and institutional structures; phenomena can therefore emerge within different contexts.

Less fruitful, but nevertheless influential, is the concept of *(cultural) imperialism* which is associated with the thesis of *Americanization*. In comparative communication research, Americanization means a directional, one-way process of convergence between the political communication practices of the United States and other countries. The Americanization concept, however, has proved too simple to be scientifically meaningful. More applicable and to the point is the concept of *hybridization*. It has quickly gained currency in many areas, including the international comparison of electoral campaign communication. In this context, it means the implementation of selected components of a cross-national and cross-cultural style of campaigning in order to supplement country-specific and culture-specific traditional styles of campaigning and campaign coverage. Hybrid styles constitute a combination of modern techniques -- influenced by the American standard model -- with country-specific traditions of indigenous political and media cultures. The results of recent comparative studies do not support the notion of a directional Americanization process (see, for example, Swanson & Mancini, 1996; Plasser & Plasser, 2002). Instead, autonomous adaptation processes take place. These processes are the elements of a structural change of the political and media systems. In many mass democracies, this change occurs in the form of an intrinsically motivated process which gradually modifies traditional styles, practices, and routines, and which varies in different countries depending on their system-specific and culture-specific arrangements (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; Plasser & Plasser, 2002).

The empirical findings concerning hybridization are highly compatible with the concept of globalization based on complex connectivity and the concept of modernization based on endogenous changes. Furthermore, the hybridization concept underlines that it is too early to speculate about the irrelevance of the nation-state and national culture as points of reference in comparative research. It seems that national actors are still key institutions that translate international trends into policies, and these policies do vary among nations. Globalization does not simply do away with traditional institutions in politics and the media. Consequently, we can conclude that with regard to the basic principle of comparing separate cases, there is currently no reason to dismiss proven strategies of comparative studies as long as these strategies are completed by including the modifications suggested herein.

The main challenge lies in how to combine these theories of international communication with comparative designs and yet to remain consistent. The obvious advantage of each of these theories lies in their potential to help us understand and explain that the cases we compare are often interconnected. Moreover, these theories allow us to account for the fact that the countries we compare are not stable blocks frozen in time but dynamic, evolving social systems. Eventually, depending on which of these theories of international communication we work with, change is explained in terms of internal or external influences or a combination of both. Thus, we hope that by supplementing

comparative research with the theoretical repertoire of international communication we will have a better tool and be better equipped to extend the intellectual frontiers of comparative research in media systems and be able to grasp the complexities of macro-analytical changes in a world of global communication.

## CONCLUSIONS

Global processes of diffusion do not spell the end of the comparative research of media systems. They however demand for comparative designs that account for the fact that national media systems are becoming increasingly interconnected. Our first suggestion would be to include additional levels of analysis below and above the nation state level, as shown in the examples we presented. Our second suggestion is to break down the barriers between the disciplines Comparative Communication Research and International Communications and to acknowledge that both fields have become increasingly interlinked in their theoretical foundations. Here as well, we presented some concrete examples. Our third suggestion refers to tendencies of de-nationalization: One should take them seriously, but should be cautious not to overrate their impact. Careful analyses time and again show that the national level is still relevant and meaningful and that media systems can be characterized and compared along these lines. Thus, we are not standing at the end of comparative media systems research, but carefully advancing it further in the light of globalization and transnational communication.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Globalization cannot be limited to economic factors such as global markets for goods, money or commodity chains, but does also refer to global transportation and communication flows, global environmental issues, global inequalities, issues of global threats and justice.

<sup>2</sup>We will return to this dilemma, known as Galton's Problem in the comparative literature, in the next section.

## REFERENCES

- Adoni, H., Caspi, D., & Cohen, A. (2006). *Media, Minorities and Hybrid Identities: The Arab and Russian Communities in Israel*. New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- Anokwa, K., Lin, C., & Salwen, M. (Eds.) (2003). *International Communication: Concepts and Cases*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

- Babones, S. (2006). Conducting Global Social Research. In C. Chase-Dunn & S. J. Babones (Eds.), *Global Social Change: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (pp. 8-30). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (2001). Americanization Reconsidered: UK-US Campaign Communication Comparisons Across Time. In W. Lance Bennett & Robert M. Entman (Eds.), *Mediated Politics. Communication in the Future of Democracy* (pp. 380-403). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Castles, F. G. (Ed.) (1993). *Families of Nations: Patterns of Public Policy in Western Democracies*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.
- Castles, F. G., & Obinger, H. (2008). Worlds, Families, Regimes: Country Clusters in European and OECD Area Public Policy. *West European Politics*, 31(1), 321-344.
- Chadha, K. & Kavoori, A. P. (2005). Globalization and Mapping Interactions in Policies, Markets and Formats. In J. Curran & M. Gurevitch (Eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (pp. 84-103). London: Hodder Arnold.
- Esser, F., & Pfetsch, B. (2004). Meeting the Challenges of Global Communication and Political Integration: The Significance of Comparative Research in a Changing World. In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch (Eds.), *Comparing Political Communication. Theories, Cases, and Challenges* (pp. 384-410). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gurevitch, M. & J. G. Blumler (2004). State of the Art of Comparative Political Communication Research: Poised for Maturity? In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch (Eds.), *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges* (pp. 325-343). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hallin, D. C. & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Keman, H. (2002). The Development of the Study of Comparative Politics. In H. Keman (Ed.), *Comparative Democratic Politics* (pp. 16-30). London: Sage.
- Kleinstauber, H. J. (2004). Comparing Mass Communication Systems: Media Formats, Media Contents and Media Processes. In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch (Eds.), *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges* (pp. 64-86). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kohn, M. L. (1987). Cross-National Research as an Analytic Strategy: American Sociological Association, 1987 Presidential Address. *American Sociological Review*, 52(6), 713-731
- Landman, T. (2008). *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). London: Routledge.
- Livingstone, S. (2008). Comparative and Transnational Approaches to the Field of Media and Communications: Reflections from the Project EU Kids Online. Presentation to the Department of Media, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, November 7, 2008
- Morris, N. & Waisbord, S. (2001). *Media and Globalization: Why the State Matters*. Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Norris, P. (2004). Global Political Communication: Good Governance, Human Development and Mass Communication. In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch (Eds.), *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges* (pp. 115-150). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Peters, G. (1998). *Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods*. London: Palgrave.
- Pfetsch, Barbara (2004). From Political Culture to Political Communications Culture: A Theoretical Approach to Comparative Analysis. In Frank Esser & Barbara Pfetsch (Eds.), *Comparing Political*

- Communication. Theories, Cases, and Challenges (344-366). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pfetsch, B. (2008a). Political Communication System. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Communications* (pp. 3687-3690). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Pfetsch, B. (2008b). Political Communication Culture. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Communications* (pp. 3683-3686). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Pfetsch, B. & Maurer, P. (2008). Mediensysteme und politische Kommunikationsmilieus im internationalen Vergleich: Theoretische Überlegungen zur Untersuchung ihres Zusammenhangs. In G. Melischek, J. Seethaler & J. Wilke (Eds.), *Medien und Kommunikationsforschung im Vergleich. Grundlagen, Gegenstandsbereiche, Verfahrensweisen* (pp. 99-119). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
- Plasser, F., & Plasser G. (2002): *Global Political Campaigning. A Worldwide Analysis of Campaign Professionals and their Practises* Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Przeworski, A. & Teune, H. (1970). *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. Malabar: Krieger.
- Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four Theories of the Press*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Swanson, D. L., & Mancini, P. (Eds.), *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy*. Westport CT: Praeger.
- Thussu, D. (2001). *International Communication: Continuity and Change*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Voltmer, K. (2008a). Democratization, Role of the Media. In C. Holtz-Bacha & L. L. Kaid (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (pp. 175-179). London: Sage.
- Voltmer, K. (2008b). Comparing Media Systems in New Democracies: East Meets South Meets West. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 1(1), 23-40.